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## **Participation, Representation and Voice in the Fight against Gender Violence: The Case of the Women's Movement in Spain**

By Adriana Sandu<sup>1</sup>

### **Abstract**

This article provides a critical examination of 'whiteness' and notions of 'sisterhood solidarity' in the context of women's fight against gender violence in Spain. Drawing on intersectionality theory this article focuses on how different women's organisations deal with gender violence policy in Spain, how this debate is framed, who makes the claims, and what structural inequalities are being preserved in this process. Using qualitative interviews with women activists, observations and participation in meetings and debates of women's organisations in Madrid and Barcelona during 2007-2008, this research explores the inter-relations between majority and minority women's mobilization, organization, political influence and voice. Their perspectives highlight how multiple inequalities experienced by ethnic and migrant women constrain their participation in the mainstream feminist movement.

*Key words:* gender violence, migration, women's movement

### **Intersecting gender, class and ethnicity in the Spanish Context: Multiple points of oppression**

This study is placed within the theoretical context of social movement theory discussing issues of frame alignment and movement participation<sup>2</sup> (McAdams and Scott 2005; Snow and Benford 1992). Particularly drawing on the discourse analysis approach as developed by Bacchi (1999, 2005) in 'What's the problem represented to be?' and the frame analysis approach as developed by Verloo (2007), this article aims to understand how different women's organisations develop strategies in relation to gender violence policy in Spain, how the debate is framed and by whom, who makes the claims, who is included in the debate and what structural inequalities are being preserved in this process. This aims to provide a framework for claims made by majority and minority women activists during the course of this research, stressing the importance of voice and representation in contemporary discourse.

Ethnic and minority women affected by gender violence stand at a focal point of exclusion, where ethnicity/race and gender, and nationality/immigration status intersect, forming a similar 'matrix of oppression' to that Collins (2000) described for black women in the United States. Using intersectionality theory (Collins 1991, 2000; Crenshaw 1989, 1997, 2006; McCall, 2005), to address notions of 'representation and voice', this study examines dynamics of 'sisterhood solidarity', 'whiteness' and 'otherness' within the Spanish women's movement.

Currently there is little progress towards an intersectional approach to inequalities in Spain, an approach that would address the different forms of inequality voiced by various

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<sup>2</sup>. Frame alignment and movement participation refer to both opportunities and constraints for women's organisations to take part in particular discourses and debates

minority and migrant women in this study. ‘Majority’ (autóctonas) and ‘minority’ women activists seem to take a unique approach to gender oppression, patriarchy, and ethnicity/race, one that mostly ignores the arguments of postcolonial second wave feminists. This article therefore highlights the well-known critique of feminist activism and scholarship forwarded by black and postcolonial feminists (Carby 1982; Mohanty, 1994; Narayan 1997; Crenshaw, 1997; Collins 2000) and argues that it is not fully considered within the Spanish women’s movement, dominated by white, middle class activists. It discusses the impact this white, majority dominance has on social exclusion and inequality, political opportunity structures, representation and voice of marginalised groups of women and argues that the current interplay between institutions, women’s agency and political discourses need to be reframed in order for such inequalities to be addressed.

### **Historical Overview of the Spanish Women’s Movement**

In the last decades Spain witnessed unprecedented Socio-political and cultural changes, with social and civil rights movements having a major impact in key policy areas such as gender equality, same sex marriage, divorce and custody laws. The death of General Franco in 1975 and the dismantling of the authoritarian system imposed in Spain after the Civil War was a turning point in the Spanish Women’s Movement (Threlfall 1985). The women’s movement in Spain radically altered the everyday life of women and men by challenging and redefining dominant conceptions and practices of citizenship, including femininity, masculinity, work, politics, love, intimacy, sexuality and family (Mendez Platero 2007). Subsequently, the EU has strongly influenced the Spanish women’s movement through for example, the creation of the European Women’s Lobby in 1990 and the Spanish European Women’s Lobby (Coordinadora Española para el Lobby Europeo de Mujeres - CELEM) in March 1993. As one of the first organisation to be established in Spain, it was led, like in most other European countries, by middle-class, white, professional women. During the early 1980s, the rapid rise to power of the Socialist Party, (Partido Socialista Obrero Español- PSOE), exercised a crucial influence on the way the women’s movement evolved. The development of women-friendly state institutions, such as the Institute of Women (IW) (*Instituto de la Mujer*) in 1983 marked the beginning of the institutionalisation of the women’s movement (Threlfall, 2010). Among the most important, and also much debated in the previous conservative years, the Gender Violence Law (1/2004) was finally passed in December 2004. Other legislative achievements affected parity government, reforms of the Civil Code allowing homosexual marriage (July 2005), the National Equality Law (2007) and changes to Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) law (1995, and 2005)<sup>3</sup>.

In examining internal political dynamics of parties, Threlfall (2007) argues that such achievements cannot be detached from the feminist struggles and their relation to party elites (in this case the Socialist Workers Party), in order to understand why it opened party gates to women politicians. Threlfall explains that agency of the women’s movement, particularly its institutionalist socialist-feminist wing, needs to be considered when impact on gender policy is examined (ibid.). Wider academic, public and political debates around issues of citizenship, multiculturalism, diversity and social inclusion continued to be limited in Spain throughout the

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<sup>3</sup> Immigration from Sub-Saharan countries where FGM is practiced, led to an increasing number of countries in Europe to adopt specific criminal law provisions to prohibit FGM including Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Italy, Spain, Sweden and the UK (Amnesty International, <http://www.endfgm.eu/en/female-genital-mutilation/fgm-in-europe/fgm-and-criminal-law>).

1990s (Lister *et al.* 2007) and only appeared in public debate a decade later (García and Lombardo 2002; Canto, 2003). Criticism by activist immigrant groups and academics arose in regard to use of the concept of citizenship, which focuses on legal citizenship or on issues of regional identity specific to certain political communities (sub-state nationalism in the Basque Country or Cataluña) (Muñoz Sánchez, 2003). Other dimensions of the citizenship concept such as social, intimate, ethnic and religious citizenship are not formally integrated in the feminist debates and this has impacted on how the women's movement addresses women's rights, particularly those of ethnic minority and migrant women. Spanish researchers argue that since Spain has only recently experienced a large immigration (Bruquetas-Callejo *et al.* 2008), issues of diversity, inclusion and representation have not been at the core of the women's movement. Immigration has witnessed a ten-fold rise in the last 20 years, with the foreign born population legally residing in Spain rising from 180,000 in 1980 to about 2,738,932 in 2005. Moroccans were traditionally the largest immigrant community in Spain (13 per cent of all foreign born residents), but they were rapidly overtaken by other immigrant groups from Latin America (Columbians, Ecuadorians, Peruvians) and more recently from Eastern Europe (Immigration Annual Statistic Book<sup>4</sup>).

Despite a long presence in the country, Spanish Roma women were also excluded from the mainstream debate and their movement has been peripheral to the mainstream women's movement. While the south of Spain traditionally had stronger bodies of Roma associations, at the national level, the involvement with social and political issues is a new development, focused mainly on integration (2). Similarly, issues pertaining to the LGBT movement, and to disabled women did not reach the feminist agenda until the late 1990s (Trujillo, 2007) (3). The issue of representation of self to others via a collective identity and the implications this has on the representation of interests has been previously discussed in the literature (Jenson 1996; Rochon 1998, Crenshaw 1991), but these debates have not been paralleled in Spain. Intersectionality theory argues that 'women experience oppression in varying configurations and in varying degrees of intensity' (Ritzer, 2007: 204). This is why cultural patterns of oppression are not only interrelated, but are bound together and influenced by the intersectional systems of society. Intersectionality theory is useful in understanding how different women's organisations position themselves in regard to ethnic and migrant's women's gender violence issues. While Spain has recently made significant advances in gender equality policies, the national government still holds an unitary approach – in which inequalities are dealt with by separate institutions with gender having primacy. An intersectional approach to tackle multiple inequalities and multiple discrimination is still missing from national policy and academic debates in Spain (Platero, 2008; Bustelo, 2009) and this study's main contribution is to highlight this approach to the debate on gender violence in the Spanish context (4). This research seeks to understand whether 'majority' women's organisations have embraced and accepted, or resisted and rejected the interests of 'minority' women (Sudbury, 1998). It also examines whether 'majority' and 'minority' women's organisations have formed alliances in order to influence public policy.

## **Data and research methods**

To understand how policies around gender violence are framed, and by whom, this study tries to unpack the dynamic of the women's movement in Spain, focusing on the relationship between majority and minority women's organisation working with gender violence issues.

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<sup>4</sup> [www.extranjeros.mtas.es/general/datosestadisticos\\_index.html](http://www.extranjeros.mtas.es/general/datosestadisticos_index.html)

Purposive snow-ball sampling was used to recruit interviewees. The study was originally intended to cover a mix of 'ethnic majority' and 'ethnic minority' women's organisations. However, the organisational landscape in Spain is not so clearly divided between ethnic majority and minority women's organisations. It can be described as a mixture of organisations headed by men, for ethnic minorities and migrants (with women's sections developed within recent years) and those run by Spanish 'majority' women (autóctonas). A few can be described as mixed organisations (tailored towards providing support services to both ethnic minority and majority women, focused more broadly on employment and skills' training, integration, diversity and gender violence)<sup>5</sup>.

Interview questions asked about collaborations and strategies among women's organisations in relation to gender violence aiming to see what types of coalitions, were initiated; what organisations took part, when, who took the initiative, what issues were prioritised, strategies used, types of funding (government grants, private donations, etc) and what was the outcome of a particular cooperation (partnerships, legislative change, ongoing cooperation). Questions about representation, participation and voice were asked in order to identify opportunities and constraints in such dialogues and collaborations. By interviewing representatives of both majority and minority women's organisations, this study paid attention to the 'problem representations' as voiced by women themselves.

In addition to the interviews, a background analysis of the women's movement was conducted, including consultations with academics and grass roots activists in Madrid and document analysis of reports, newspaper articles, contributions to parliamentary commissions, white papers, and national and international legislative acts on domestic violence, and racism and discrimination. This background data collection is referred to in this article as 'field notes'. Content analysis approach was used to examine the field notes interviews using pre-established themes (coding frames) such as participation, representation, voice, strategies, coalition forming and partnerships, policy influence, gender violence support, minority rights. As this study was conducted in three subsequent stages, I used pattern coding (grouping summaries into smaller number of themes) in order to focus the research in subsequent fieldwork, and to be able to map local incidents and interactions (Miles and Huberman, 1994). Based on an inductive approach, this analysis is grounded in the data.

The main criterion for selecting participants, was to include those organisations influencing national political/legislative change on issues of violence against women, including domestic violence, honour killings, forced marriage, and female genital mutilation. Sixteen semi-structured qualitative interviews were conducted (in Spanish) with women activists leaders of such organisations (or sections), lasting between one and two hours each. The interviews took place in Madrid and Barcelona between June 2007 and September 2008. They were followed by discussions with other members of the organisation and sometimes complemented by visits at other centres where programmes for victims of gender violence operate. Some of the interviews were conducted during the time of the 'Black Tuesday' (February 26<sup>th</sup> 2008) when four women were killed in acts of gender violence. This sparked several gathering and demonstrations in Madrid and I was invited to attend these events by women activists interviewed at that time. Participating at these events added to my understanding of the women's movement dynamic overall, the interactions formed and space created to organise, debate and protest (field notes, Madrid, 2008).

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<sup>5</sup> A full list of the organisations interviewed in this study can be found in the annex

### **Claiming the fight against gender violence: together or apart?**

Recognition and struggle for political voice and equality is extensively discussed in feminist scholarship, especially in American and British work by black and ethnic minority women (Carby 1982; Thorntorn Dill, 1983; Amos and Parmar, 1984; Collins, 2000), who have protested against a white hegemony. White feminists have discussed issues of privilege and complicity with structures of racism and discrimination (Bhavnani and Coulson 1985; Frankenberg 1993; Crenshaw 1997; Phillips 2003 and 2007), yet not applied an intersectional approach to inclusion practices within certain feminist movements. In the case of violence against women, white feminists in Spain have stressed that sex and gender inequality are the central if not sole cause of the structural domination of women in society. Nonetheless, other minority groups of women understand misogyny as co-constructed with racial and class stratification, heterosexism, xenophobia, and other systems of oppression. Different ‘problem representations’ are thus observed and discussed. While trying to capture any cooperation or alliances between minority and majority women’s organisations in regard to gender violence it highlights tensions as well as potential silences.

### **‘Too much’ judicial power**

Majority (Spanish, white) women activists interviewed in this study hold values specific to socialist and radical feminism, which tend to focus on the rights of women as a group, challenging the ideologies of capitalism and especially patriarchy. Inherited legal and administrative structures and processes, such as those of the judicial power hinder, in majority women’s view, the implementation of several laws aimed at addressing gender violence. The focus of their fight is therefore aimed at challenging these powers:

*‘The law is applied by the judges; the other day we met a judge who said that it can’t be that a woman with a university degree experiences [gender] violence (...). The training of professionals is critical. The training of judges is critical...the problem is that the judges are in charge of their own training. They have this institution that gives them regulations and they don’t let anyone enter there (...). They receive a training of five hours and they consider themselves gender experts.’*

(Interview, Madrid, June 2007)

Fighting against such structural and legal barriers constitutes a priority for the majority women’s movement gender violence agenda and only certain groups of women are involved in this discourse (mainly those led by white, middle class, professionals activists). Central to their work is to offer gender violence educational programmes to public institutions involved with potential victims of gender violence. Several critiques have been made by women’s organisations, following the implementation of the Gender Violence Law as cases of violence increased since the legislation was passed in 2004. Between 2003 and 2010, 545 women were killed by partner or ex-partner in gender/domestic violence cases in Spain (National Observatory of Gender Violence, June 8<sup>th</sup> 2011), with a high of 100 deaths occurring in 2007 and 113 in 2008 – the time during which the research was conducted (*Red feminista*, June 08, 2011). Majority activists claim that without this training (enhancing awareness on gender violence issues), these institutions will keep failing to prevent and combat gender violence.

## **Gender violence services for all**

Another central dimension for majority women activists is to provide services for all victims of gender violence, ranging from preventative programmes to legal help, counselling and intensive therapy sessions. Majority women argue that oppression is similar for all women when it comes to gender violence; simply because they are women.

*'This is not an organisation for immigrant women; it is not pro-immigrants, it is pro-women; it doesn't matter that they come from one place or another'.*  
(Interview, Madrid, June 2007)

While universal services are a positive development, they will not be reached by migrant and minority women who may experience gender violence differently. Migrant women have complex and often differentiated needs, and often live in social isolation that places them in a more vulnerable position than majority women, who are often relying on family and friends for help. One majority respondent explained that government policies should not address women's issues differently, according to one's ethnic background.

*'I think that the policies carried out currently by the government do not distinguish. For example in our centre [...] the immigrant women can come in the same manner as the Spanish women. They don't have to fulfil more requirements, or less, with headscarf or without headscarf.'*  
(Interview, Madrid, October 2007)

This suggests that intersectional perspectives on inequalities experienced by different groups of women are not easily acknowledged by majority Spanish activists. Actions and claims against gender violence are clearly prioritised in their debate, but limited consideration is given to additional barriers that minority women may encounter when trying to access gender violence services.

## **'The other' and sisterhood solidarity**

Issues of agency, voice and representation are blurred in this context, when categorising and discussing 'the other' groups of women who experience gender violence. While majority women talked about 'voicing' the needs of 'other women' and advocating for the right of protection for all women, they did not talk about developing opportunities where migrant and minority women could themselves claim such rights. One majority respondent argued that restrictions in current immigration policy in Spain prohibit migrant women to engage more fully in public life; she explained that migrant women's issues don't pertain to the feminist agenda in their entirety, as they are generally incorporated in migrants or minority groups' claims. She thus justified why the organisation she represented had not had much involvement with migrant and minority women's issues.

*'This [collaborations with migrant and minority women] is a theme that I know less about, and it is more complicated because it has to do with the general social integration policies for all immigrants in our country. It is of course always more difficult for the*

*immigrant women... but this is a topic that we don't work a lot with and therefore is difficult for me to give a detailed opinion.'*  
(Madrid, June 2007)

While acknowledging the increased difficulties for migrant women in general, this statement demonstrates a particular framing of the inclusion and representation issues. The 'problem' is represented as pertaining to immigration policy. Migrant and minority women are caught between two major discourses, and perhaps not represented in any. Opportunities for cooperation and alliance with migrant women's organisations were not prioritised. Other majority respondents claimed that migrant and minority women are not ready to organise, protest and raise their voice in the feminist movement.

*'They don't have time, they work long hours and have no childcare, they take their own children with them to meetings ... how can they be feminists?'*(interview, June, 2007 , Madrid)

Majority women do not internalise issues pertaining to 'other' groups of women in a common women's rights agenda. The issues of 'the others' remain external to their debate either because the immigration policies do not create the right context, or because of the 'the other' women themselves. Although some majority respondents recognised the 'culture of associations' of some migrant women (such as the Latin American) they argue that currently, these groups lack maturity to organise and protest.

*When they arrive to a new country they go through phases, or degrees (of maturity) in order to get to the point of forming associations. The immigration problem in Spain is rather recent, and therefore it will get better or the moment will arrive when immigrant women will form associations on their own.'* (Interview, Madrid, June 2007)

Roma Spanish women, despite the centuries' long presence in Spain and having created their own women's organisations, were also discussed as 'the others' by majority women. While different actors frame each other, those less influential are being framed by those leading a particular discourse. These interviews show that majority women activist in Spain have the tendency to speak for 'the others', leaving the question of whether they believe the minority are not able to speak for themselves, as the quote below illustrates:

*'I think that fundamentally the problem is in 'their' [the Roma women's] dialogue. Now, what we [the Spanish women] are doing...is to speak for them, that is, to speak out about what is happening to them.'*(Interview, Madrid, June 2007)

The Roma women represent another group caught in between two major discourses, one led by the women's movement focused on gender equality and gender violence and the one led by minority Roma men activists, focused on minority rights, diversity, inclusion and anti-discrimination more generally. When asked about how the women's movement addresses gender violence issues pertaining to Roma women, one majority respondent said:



*The Gypsies are a different ball game. They have their own rules and their own ways to deal with it [gender violence]. We don't work much with them and when we have worked, it proved difficult. (Interview June, Madrid 2007).*

Such a framing inadvertently (re)produces an image of migrant and minority women as unable to get involved, while at the same time a delineation of 'us' and 'them' in the women's movement discourse is created. The question remains, therefore, who are the more influential players and what are the issues that they put forward on the political agenda. Koopmans *et al.* (2005: 16) argue that in any given political context there is a fluid and dynamic set of opportunities and constraints that can enable or hinder the success of collective action. The authors argue that however fluid, inequalities, such as those rooted in ethnic difference, when part of the social structure, may have a more direct impact on mobilisation (*ibid*). Majority women who continue to lead of the feminist discourse in Spain are in the position to create opportunities to address such inequalities and constraints. Below are the claims made minority respondents, who stress the importance of voicing their own needs.

#### **'But we can talk for ourselves'**

Overall, minority respondents claimed having experienced a limited 'solidarity' with majority women's movement, and limited opportunities for participation in current debates on gender violence. They said that while they are invited to different round-tables, seminars and consultation groups, this seems to be done only when required by a third party, such as a government initiative, or as part of a European or international forum (field notes, June 200 and February, 2008).

*'Some things [pertaining to immigrant women's issues] have been integrated [by the majority organisations] but only symbolically [gestures quotation marks sign "..."]. What I want to say is that the immigrant women can talk for themselves, but they are not always allowed to be the voice of their own problems, which would be the just thing.'* (Interview, Madrid, June 2007)

Another minority respondent discussing the Roma case, stressed that Roma women are not always invited from the inception of a certain debate, law or reform.

*'We, the Gypsy women have a problem ...because they [the Spanish women] were not counting on us. When they were drafting a law or guideline..., it was us who had to demand that they involve us (...) They have the perception that we are a step behind them, so they give us things already done, they don't let us participate from the first moment when an initiative is being created. We have to ask to be allowed to participate from the beginning.'* (Interview, Madrid, February 2008)

Minority women activists framed the problem of gender violence differently. They place a higher emphasis on the structural disadvantages faced by particular groups of women, such as those linked to a particular legal status or to group pressures experienced by women belonging to certain ethnicities (Roma, Muslim). Therefore, they argued, when these women experience gender violence, they become 'doubly vulnerable'. For example, undocumented migrant women

exposed to gender violence, often do not ask for help or approach specialised services because they fear deportation. These women were said to lack knowledge and information about the options available to them. They endure violence for years before they are able to expose it (fieldnotes, Barcelona, 2007).

Another critical aspect of gender violence for migrant women, not prioritised by majority feminists, is female genital mutilation (FGM). FGM<sup>6</sup> is a surgical procedure performed on the genitals of girls and women and is practiced in many parts of the world, but extensively in sub-Saharan Africa. In Spain, FGM is practiced among various immigrant groups, primarily from Gambia, Mali and Senegal, of whom a higher percentage reside in Cataluña ([www.ine.es](http://www.ine.es)). The Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) explicitly recognise that FGM is a violation of human rights.<sup>7</sup> However, majority women interviewed said that FGM is a specific issue pertaining to African women, with cultural barriers too complex to be fully challenged by the women's movement. Minority and migrant women respondents however disagree; they believe that with sustained support from majority women, FGM can be tackled despite complex cultural barriers. For them, the fight against FGM and early marriages constitutes a priority in the fight against gender violence. One minority respondent argued that it was through such supportive actions from majority feminists that the legislation making FGM illegal in Spain was finally enacted. The legislation making the FGM practice illegal was first passed in 1995, Ley Orgánica 10/1995, 23 /11 Código Penal and later modified to include extra-jurisdiction prosecution, which means that it is now possible to prosecute the offenders on foreign territory (Ley Orgánica 3/2005, 8/07)). However, they argue, after the enactment no further work has been put in place to prevent the practice from being carried out and to facilitate early detection or (field notes, Barcelona, 2007). She emphasized that African women are largely disconnected from the fight of the majority women's movement activists.

*'There is too much [gender] violence in general, and this is bad, but it is worse for African women [living in Spain]. We see that the western women have a voice now, they can talk, they hold demonstrations about their rights, the Government supports them, but we, the African women, don't have anything.'* (Barcelona, interview, September 2007)

Minority women involved in combating such practices in Spain, claim that the lack of cooperation between minority and majority women is mirrored by a lack of funds from key government entities to pursue such a task (field notes, Madrid, 2007). However, majority women specifically stressed that forced marriage and FGM are not a priority on the gender violence agenda, stressing that this practice only pertains to a small proportion of women affected by gender violence in Spain.

Discussions such as the above, around FGM and early marriage, constitute examples of the pattern that emerged during these interviews in relation to representation, integration and common or dissonant claims made by majority and minority women's organisations in Spain. Such images were prominent during the interviews conducted for this study. From the outset, ethnic minority women's groups have generally been embedded in mixed ethnic minority

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<sup>6</sup> Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) covers a range of procedures, which are also referred to as female circumcision, ablation and introcision.

<sup>7</sup> Article 5(a) of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), adopted in 1979.

organisations (comprising both women and men); they began forming women's sections, out of an increased need to have their own voice inside those organisations (field notes, Madrid, 2007). Ethnic minority women, such as Roma, African, Latin American or Eastern European, have been known to be gathering on a more informal basis, often through activities apparently not connected to feminist issues, but to issues pertaining to their immigration status (field notes, Madrid 2007). Such informal spaces for encounter need to be further explored and taken into consideration for a more comprehensive inclusion of minority women's issues into the broader feminist debate. Minority respondents claim that not being formally 'visible' in the society is a form of oppression in itself. Lack of opportunity for voice and participation to the agenda setting on women's movement was stressed repeatedly by minority respondents in this research. This shows that despite progress in social, legal and political areas, racial and ethnic divisions continue to marginalise certain groups of women in the modern democracy of Spain, and this situation has hardly been addressed by majority women's movement actors.

## **Conclusion**

The central argument of this research was to identify black, ethnic minority and migrant women's struggles in dialog with the mainstream 'majority' [white] led women's movement. It also aimed to highlight opportunities for alliances, coalitions and integration. Although the mainstream debate recognises women's diversity, it largely fails to prioritise critical constraints faced by minority women victims of gender violence, and especially to provide the space where these women can voice their issues. In a context of rapid societal change, economic development and increased migration, this research is critical for a comprehensive understanding of women's groups whose voices may remain silent and may remain disadvantaged. Findings from this research demonstrate that the types of barriers encountered by ethnic minority and migrant women in women's movement activism on gender violence highlight unspoken divides and reproduce certain patriarchal stereotypes within the current feminist discourse in Spain. The analysis of the sixteen qualitative interviews shows that claims made by women's organisations have come mostly from ethnic majority women's organisations with large membership, well known for lobbying and advocating on issues of gender equality and violence against women, but also coinciding with affiliations with the Socialist government.

Overall, there is little evidence of an intersectional approach concerning violence against women in Spain. Ethnicity, class and race are still silent categories within the women's movement and will remain so unless these silences are problematized and brought into the open for discussion and debate (Bacchi, 1999, 2005). Particular problems remain in relation to undocumented migrants who have been subjected to domestic violence. The main aim of using Bacchi's 'What's the problem represented to be?' approach in this study, together with intersectionality theory, was to frame such silences in problem representations and bring them into the open. Even where majority women activists recognise that immigrant and ethnic minority women face additional barriers, they have not actively embraced their issues. This was a recurrent theme during the interviews, where minority research participants moved between feeling empowered and feeling victimised or 'silenced' by the perceived lack of opportunities to express their voice. Discourses on gender, race and ethnicity continue to be mostly shaped by majority movement actors that represent an allegedly universalistic white feminism in Spain. Although the mainstream feminist debate generally acknowledges women's diversity, it largely

falls short of including, addressing or prioritising critical constraints and limitations faced by immigrant and ethnic minority women.

Migrant and ethnic minority women's identities cross the boundaries of traditionally accepted dynamics, and the complexity of their experience seems to be neglected when gender violence is discussed within the Spanish women's movement. McCall (2005) defines these neglected points of intersection as 'intra-categorical complexities' (ibid:1780); while these women equally share characteristics of 'all women', as well as of 'all migrants' the complexity of, for example, gender violence that they experience, can be easily overlooked if different categories such as gender, race, ethnicity, social status, disability are not intersected. A recurring theme during the course of this research was the issue of 'representation of other women's issues', with the Spanish majority feminists claiming to be better positioned to fight for minority women's issues. Post-colonial feminists (Narayan 1997; Mohanty 1994) object to portrayals of women of 'non-Western' societies as passive and voiceless victims and the portrayal of Western women as modern, educated and empowered. Women activists in Spain continue to focus only on certain dimensions of feminism, challenging the subordination of women or gender hierarchies (Mazur 2008), without intersecting them with race, class or other inequalities women experience.

In the European context (and in the Spanish one in particular), interlocking oppression is caused by the fact that policies around "race" and policies around 'women' were developed in quite different ways, with black, ethnic minorities and migrant women's claims standing at the intersection of race and gender issues (Williams, 2003). This has to be carefully considered when trying to understand whose issues are voiced and by whom. As Bacchi (1999) explains, 'social problems' tend to be represented through the lenses of those actors that bring them on the agenda. She argues that it is therefore not the 'problem' itself that requires exploring, but rather how the problem is *represented*. Moreover, it is crucial to identify competing problem representations because they constitute a form of political intervention with a range of possible and tangible effects (Bacchi, 1999). Verloo (2007: 25) has recently argued that at the core of the gender debate is 'the problem of how to frame gender issues in the context of multiple differences and inequalities that exist among women'.

Addressing social structures that produce inequalities requires an extensive, consistent and radical lobbying and campaigning from actors involved in the women's movement. Yet, as discussed earlier, favourable political opportunities, is no guarantee for the mobilisation of protest, especially for vulnerable groups whose voice is just emerging. As Kjellman (2007) argues, protest requires the recognition and framing of opportunities. In the case of the women's movement in Spain, the recognition and framing of minority women's issues needs to be done by ethnic minority women's organisations themselves, in order to compensate for the fact that perhaps immigrant (male) led movements, which currently advance some of the minority women's needs, may not actually be able or willing to create political opportunities for minority women. The increasingly important debate on the possibility of alliance and co-operation between ethnic minority women's and ethnic majority women's organisations is still limited in Spain. The claims described in this study, put forward by 'the native Spanish feminists' ('*autóctonas*') and 'the other' migrant and ethnic minority women, often referred to as 'more vulnerable groups of women', have the potential to create and sustain divisions within the women's movement.

These divisions are paralleled at the European level. The EU legal framework is merely juxtaposing inequalities rather than intersecting inequalities (5). Debates on the creation of recent

institutions, such as the European Institute for Gender Equality and the Fundamental Rights Agency, show that tensions exist between different positions and groups and that inequalities are prioritised differently (Lombardo and Verloo, 2009). The argument made in this article, along with Crenshaw's concept of 'political intersectionality' (1991,1999), urges Spanish policy-makers and women activists to reflect on the dynamics of privilege and exclusion that emerge when people situated at the intersections of different inequalities are ignored. Adopting a more intersectional approach will create new understandings and new forms of co-operation and alliance. Political opportunity structures created both within the women's movement itself and within government, could open the space for a more diverse group of women to participate and voice their claims. Such an intersectional approach requires rethinking of the current interplay between institutions, women's agency and political discourses.

This article has offered a critical perspective on the relationship among key actors involved in the women's movement in an increasingly multicultural Spain. The analysis showed that depending on how ethnic minority and immigrant women's positions are represented or talked about by different actors, a woman can either be victimised or empowered; represented or not represented in the feminist discourse; with or without a real political opportunity. Key questions such as: '*where and how is feminism marginalising ethnic minority women, disabled or lesbian women?*' still need to be answered in the context of contemporary and future research. By exploring ways in which ethnic and minority women's 'problems' are represented' and the intersections of different inequalities they experience, this article argues that recognising the plurality of women's experiences, their diverse struggles for social justice, and resources on gender could be redirected to a variety of social collectives (Woodward 2005; Squires, 2007) with equal opportunities for participation and voice. While the post-colonial feminist critique has perhaps not yet been accepted and embraced by the majority women's movement in Spain, the adoption of an inclusive approach to women's agency and the creation of dynamic political opportunity structures can offer new ways into understanding and improving participation, integration, representation and inclusion in a multicultural society.

## End Notes

1. In this article the broader concept of 'women's movements' has been used to include collective action by women making gendered identity claims (McBride and Mazur, 2008)
2. Politically, Spanish Roma became more active in the last ten years, through the development of governmental departments, such as the National Gypsy Secretary (*Secretariado Nacional Gitano*) and the National Council of Gypsy People (*Consejo Estatal del Pueblo Gitano*), mainly focused on integration policies
3. At the European level, it was not until 1997 when the Article 13 of the Amsterdam Treaty extended the anti-discrimination remit beyond gender equality to include discrimination based on sex, racial or ethnic origin, religion or belief, disability age, or sexual orientation (Williams, 2003:127).
4. Until very recently, and particularly during the time of this study, immigration laws in Spain focused very little on cases of violence against migrant women, such as undocumented and dependent spouses (14/2003). Since 2008, some of these issues were addressed by immigration Law 2/2009, which introduced a special clause to protect undocumented dependent migrant women victims of gender violence (art 31, L 2/2009).

5. As a result of the expansion of European Union law to combat discrimination, a number of European countries have reformed their equality bodies and laws. This has resulted in the creation of 'single equality bodies', such as the European Women's Lobby (EWL), the European Network Against Racism (ENAR) and the International Lesbian and Gay Association-Europe (ILGA-Europe).

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- Law concerning Separation and Divorce - Law 15/2005.
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de la Ley Orgánica 4/2000, de 11 de enero, sobre derechos y libertades de los extranjeros en España y su integración social)  
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 Law on Female Genital Mutilation - Ley Orgánica 10/1995, amendments to the Criminal Code, (23 /11 Código Penal), later modified to include extra-jurisdiction prosecution, which means that it is now possible to prosecute the offenders on foreign territory Ley Orgánica 3/2005, 8/07

## Annex

### **Women's organisations who took part in this research**

#### **Annex – list of women's organisations interviewed**

1. Committee for investigating the maltreatment against women – Comisión para la investigación de malos tratos a mujeres <http://www.malostratos.org/>
2. Women Foundation – Fundación Mujeres <http://www.fundacionmujeres.es/>
3. Progressive women's foundation- Fundación Mujeres Progresistas <http://www.fmujeresprogresistas.org/>
4. Centre for assisting victims of sexual aggression – Centro de asistencia a victimas de agresiones sexuales – CAVAS <http://www.violacion.org/quienes/default.html>
5. Spanish coordinator of the European Women's Lobby – La coordinadora Española del Lobby Europeo de Mujeres: [http://www.celem.org/conoce\\_que.html](http://www.celem.org/conoce_que.html)
6. THEMIS, Association of women lawyers - Asociación de Mujeres Jursitas <http://www.mujeresjuristasthemis.org/>
7. Federation of Association of Separated and divorced Women – Federación de asociaciones de mujeres separadas y divorciadas; <http://www.separadasydivorciadas.org/>
8. Association Women Opañel - Asociación Mujeres Opañel - [http://www.carabanchelsemueve.org/conocenos/red/asociacion\\_mujeres\\_opanel.html](http://www.carabanchelsemueve.org/conocenos/red/asociacion_mujeres_opanel.html)
9. Association Rumiñahui - Ecuadorian women section Asociación Rumiñahui sección mujeres <http://www.ruminahui.org.es/inicio.htm>
10. Vomade Vencit - Dominican Mothers; Vomade Vencit- Madres Dominicanas <http://www.vomade.net/presentacion.html>
11. Asociation Barró (Asociación Barró) <http://www.asociacionbarro.org.es/index2.php>
12. Romi Sersení <http://www.romiserseni.com/plantillas/119/home.aspx?npag=1&pag=home&w=5378&f=9115&p=119&id=138305>
13. CA LA DONA – Barcelona; <http://caladona.pangea.org/>
14. ROMA ASSOCIATION - DROM KOTAR MASTIPEN - Barcelona <http://www.dromkotar.org/quien.en.htm>
15. AMAM – ANTI FEMALE GENITAL MUTILATION – Barcelona <http://www.amam.es/index.html>
16. EQUIS – FGM; Barcelona (Equipo de sensibilización sobre mutilación genital femenina) no website